

Public inquiry begins into bid for 12 permanent and 50 temporary caravan plots

Travellers to argue for wildlife haven pitches

By JON AUSTIN

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TRAVELLERS are today set to argue the need for a new Dale Farm on a wildlife haven.

A public inquiry starts today into Basildon Council's refusal of planning permission for 12 caravan pitches, for vulnerable families from Dale Farm, on land off Church Road, Laindon.

The families evicted from the illegal site in Crays Hill, will argue they need the plots plus an additional 50 temporary pitches on the land, owned by the Homes and Communities Agency.

Families want a "model" traveller site, with a community centre open to the public plus protected areas for lizards and newts maintained by occupants.

They are represented by campaigner Stuart Hardwicke-Carruthers and Candy Sheridan, vice-chairman of the Gypsy Council.

Mr Hardwicke-Carruthers will argue: "The project has to be a model development for the benefit of two different communities working and living together. There are sufficient funds to secure these objectives provided that Basildon works in partnership to solve a national problem."

The Homes and Communities Agency has said it will pay for the



■ On the move – some travellers temporarily went back to Dale Farm

development. The Gypsy Council also wants the agency to give it the land. If house building was ever permitted, it would receive the profits, so it could set up as a registered social landlord to provide traveller sites across the country.

As part of this agreement, resi-

dents would have to spend one day a week maintaining the protected species' habitat on the land, or they could face eviction, according to the Gypsy Council.

The council refused the initial application for 12 pitches on grounds it is a registered wildlife site and home to adders, common

lizards and great crested newts. Clive Simpson, head of planning, will argue the site is over 3.4 acres in size and an environmental impact assessment of the affect on these species of the proposed development should have been carried out. Mr Carruthers will argue the council miscalcul-

RESIDENTS MAY PROTEST

RESIDENTS are considering protesting outside the Towngate Theatre during the inquiry.

Paul Martin, who lives near the proposed site, off Church Road, Laindon, said he had been inundated by responses since asking people to e-mail him their views.

He said: "I have been contacted by people who are writing their objections to the MP and councillors."

Mr Martin said many residents could not make the inquiry because of work commitments.

He added: "We could possibly show the level of public support against the development by way of protest or march."

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lated the size of the land and that the Government has already said the assessment is not needed.

The hearing is due to start at the Towngate Theatre today. The Gypsy Council will ask for the 50 temporary pitches until alternative sites in Basildon are identified for displaced families.

Controversial site came top of a shortlist of four

THE proposed traveller site at Church Road, Laindon, was one of four discussed in talks last year.

It topped a shortlist of four Homes and Communities Agency sites in the borough looked at by

the council, the agency, Essex County Council and travellers.

The Echo can reveal land at Dry Street, Courtald Road, and Gardiners Close, all in Basildon, and owned by the agency, were

also looked at. A Freedom of Information Act response to the Echo showed these three were subsequently ruled out. Church Road was still being considered until council leader Tony Ball

pulled the plug after we revealed talks were taking place.

A council spokesman said: "The first time the council gave this matter detailed consideration from the planning perspective was

when the application for planning permission was lodged earlier this year.

"This was formally considered by the council and that refusal is now subject to an inquiry."



Pupils get a taste of world war

YOUNGSTERS from Cherry Tree Primary School put on their flat caps and turned on the wireless when they became evacuees for the day.

Pupils from the school, in Church Road, Basildon, dressed up in their clothes with a Forties feel, as part of their project about the Second World War and the impact it had on

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